
The Mexican Border Problem: An Authoritative Expression of the Mexican Viewpoint

Author(s): Luis G. Bossero

Source: *The Journal of Race Development*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Jul., 1916), pp. 1-13

Published by:

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29738180>

Accessed: 01-08-2014 01:21 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



<http://www.jstor.org>

THE JOURNAL OF RACE DEVELOPMENT

Vol. 7

JULY, 1916

No. 1

THE MEXICAN BORDER PROBLEM: AN AUTHORITY- TATIVE EXPRESSION OF THE MEXICAN VIEWPOINT¹

By Honorable Luis G. Bossero, Mexico City

The history of the Mexican revolution is a long one. It is the history of a people struggling against all kinds of oppression, oppression from the Spanish conquerors, oppression from native dictators and oppression from powerful foreign concessionaries sustained many times by their governments. Yet the Mexicans have won the final victory at home after the bloody struggle of the last five years.

And now when we are at peace, when the de-facto government is endeavoring to restore order and begin the reconstruction of the country, we are confronted with the possibilities of war with a mightier nation. This war or intervention—it is designated by both terms—is the result of the plottings of the enemies of Mexican reform and progress, who are the losers in the fight against privilege and monopoly. These parties have succeeded in creating a state of lawlessness on some parts of the border which has resulted in the sending of an expedition into Mexico. There is every evidence that the people who have been urging the American government to intervene in Mexico for over two years were the very same men who helped to bring about the sad conditions on the border. Your Honorable President admitted that fact and even warned the American people against it, when he declared four months ago that there were persons along the border

¹ An Address delivered June 29, before the Conference on International Relations held by the International Polity Clubs, at Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio.

who were trying "to create intolerable friction between the government of the United States and the de-facto government of Mexico, for the purpose of bringing about intervention in the interest of certain American owners of Mexican property."

It is to be regretted that at the time the Mexican raiders were pursued your government went to the extent of bringing into Mexico an army of 14,000 men with artillery, aeroplanes, etc., but left the mischief makers on this side of the border, those "American owners of Mexican property" or their agents to continue their operations with impunity. If mighty and weaker nations were accorded the same rights in this world, Mexico could have found as much right to send an expedition into the United States to prevent those "American owners" or their agents from doing mischief, as the United States thinks it had to send one into Mexico to prevent the raids. The United States army now assembled in Mexico might have been more effectively employed in the suppression of the raids by a convenient distribution of its forces along the border, in order to protect every region of it from the invasion of the raiders, and would have had moreover the advantage of preventing raids from being organized on this side of the boundary, as it is suspected was the case in some of them—the Glenn Springs raid for instance.

I am referring now to American suspicion,—American suspicions of Americans, as well as of Mexicans. Very well, we Mexicans are also suspicious of you. Indeed mutual suspicion is one of the causes of this threatened war. The gathering of such a force at one point and that point within the boundaries of Mexico is looked upon by the Mexicans and by many Americans as the first step towards actual intervention or war, for these two names mean the same thing.

Let us consider now whether the United States has a sufficient cause or has a right or anything to gain by intervening or making war in Mexico under the pretext of the border raids. It is nearly ten months since the Villa and Zapata factions of Mexico were annihilated. It is because of

this fact that the government of the United States tendered its recognition to Carranza's government as the de-facto government of Mexico. The military work of that government ever since has been directed toward the suppression of brigandage, which always follows in the wake of civil war, and to the civil work of restoring normal conditions throughout the country.

General Porfirio Diaz, to whom all credit was given in this country and elsewhere for pacifying Mexico, was busy for over three years in the suppression of brigandage, even after he had been recognized by the United States. President Juarez was busy for more than four years in exterminating the small bands of bandits which resulted from the French invasion of 1862. But to speak to you of more familiar facts, I need but to remind you that, although the American Revolution ended with a declaration of peace by Great Britain in 1783, yet it was not until April 30, 1789—*six years!*—that the organization of the present American Commonwealth went into effect. The American Civil War ended in April, 1865, and yet Federal troops were quartered in the South, and scenes of riot and disorder were frequent through the conquered territory for *ten* years. During the *ten* years referred to, conditions frequently became so unbearable to the residents of the southern states that they had recourse to a secret and illegal organization known as the Klu-Klux-Clan. The activities of the James brothers in the state of Missouri in the seventies transcended in violence any of the activities practiced by either the Villistas or the Zapatistas in Mexico today; and these two outlaws and their followers held the state at bay for a number of years.

The American Civil War was a fight between two organized armies, one of them the victor under the management of the lawful government of the country. Consequently when the war was at an end the greater part of the country came back automatically into its normal condition. The Mexican revolution has had deeper consequences than your Civil War. It has upset privileges and prejudices and it has put an oppressed and enslaved people on the road to

freedom and democracy, without having the advantage you had, of having a lawful government during the whole period of the struggle. Yet it is only ten months of peace that we have enjoyed, and our condition today is not worse than was this country's for several years after the struggle was over.

The head of the de-facto government, Mr. Carranza, is surrounded with well intentioned, able men who are busy trying to solve the many problems which confront the first government after such a convulsion. The government controls every one of the twenty-seven states of Mexico. The machinery of both federal and state governments is now in operation discharging its duties and functions. A few scattered bands of Zapatistas in the southern mountains are being pursued or starved into submission and the Villista bands have been almost exterminated. Thus the government has practically all the territory of Mexico under its sway and nothing remains as far as order is concerned but to cope with bandits and a lawless situation that necessarily follows in the wake of civil war.

The only cause of uneasiness today in Mexico is the stay of the American force which by its proportions and strength cannot be called a punitive expedition but an invading army. As a matter of fact uneasiness is the result of the stay of a foreign army in any country in the world. The "German" invasion of Mexico by the United States troops handicaps Mr. Carranza's work of pacification and reconstruction, emboldens the malcontents at home and the enemies abroad, causes a decrease in the public funds and is the cause of excitement in every class of society. Instead of checking the mischief-makers at the border, it only provokes them to new attempts, as has been seen in the raids of San Benito and San Ignacio, because some of the ignorant believe it is patriotic work to raid the United States territory as a retaliation. Others, bandits and cattle thieves, see their chance in their state of uneasiness, and the foreign interventionists, to whom the President alluded in his recent statement, are gratified by the outcome of their agencies and are likely to produce

more raids since they see in the invasion the practical result of their endeavors.

At the same time all classes of Mexicans believe that an expedition which was purported to pursue 500 bandits can not properly be increased into an army of 14,000 with field artillery—an army calculated to be used only against regular forces—and they cannot fail to draw a parallel between the present situation and that just before the war of 1847, which was forced on Mexico by the same methods as those now being used, as American historians have told us. The Mexican government is placed in such a position that to permit the stay might mean revolt and subsequent civil struggle, and to remonstrate against it or request its withdrawal leads to the sad occurrences of the last June days. In fact nobody in Mexico can believe the United States government can wish well to Mexico or try to help its government by this means of sending an army of invasion.

It is enough to say now that the sensationalist and predatory press is largely responsible for feeding to the American public a mass of misinformation and distortion of facts and exaggeration of trivial incidents. This forms a part of the deliberate endeavors of interventionist interests which have set their minds on bringing war with Mexico for their personal ends. Among the malevolent group stands out the name of William Randolph Hearst, as chief marplot, with James Gordon Bennet, editor of the New York *Herald*, as his able second. Along with this pair may be coupled the names of numerous lesser lights of journalism in the border country, where such papers as *The San Antonio Express* have striven ever since the advent of Mr. Madero to the presidency of Mexico to bring about hostile intervention. They have gone so far as to issue papers in Spanish with a view to inflaming the resident Mexicans of the United States along the border. But to stop this the Mexican government is impotent and the representations of our consuls at the border towns have been met with indifference.

Of course it follows as the result of any war that many

foreigners will loose their lives, others some property and others liberty. It would be impossible to conduct a war without some of these results. In the American Civil War, the lives of a great many foreigners were lost and much property destroyed and there were many claims asserted against the United States growing out of the conditions referred to. No adverse conclusion should therefore be drawn from the fact that a number of Americans have lost their lives in, and as a result of, the Mexican Civil War. The number of Americans killed during the actual European War is far greater than those killed in Mexico. In the sinking of the *Lusitania* alone, 115 lives were lost, while during a period of five years as stated by Secretary Lansing less than 200 Americans have lost their lives in Mexico. It is also noticeable that notwithstanding the peaceful condition of the United States in the same period, more than 200 Mexicans lost their lives in Texas and along the border.

But if this comparison is favorable to Mexico, there is something else which deserves your kind attention. Most of the loss of life and property occurred during the war with Villa, and we should not forget the fact that if Villa turned his arms against Carranza, it was to a great extent due to the intervention of two well known agents of the United States state department, and also to the endeavors of the enemies of Mexico in this country to boost Villa as a great hero. He was also permitted to import all his arms and ammunition from the United States. Villa had so much support in this country that when he was smashed by General Obregon in five successive battles, many endeavors were made to bring Carranza to compromise with him. Regardless of the fact that each day's report from the fighting front indicated unmistakably that the Villa army and the so-called convention were speedily disintegrating, the American administration continued to urge upon Carranza the necessity of dealing with his weakened enemy, and it was not until the Latin-American diplomats, with their thorough understanding of the situation, were called in, that the administration finally discerned that Carranza

constituted the dominating force in Mexican public affairs and the soul, source and fountain head of the executive power of the republic. It is also to be observed that Villa had that support in spite of the atrocities attributed to him during the fight against Huerta, of which two at least had been investigated and found absolutely true. I refer to the murders of Benton and Shaw. Whereas a year ago South and Central America were indifferent to Carranza, there is today an unanimity of opinion extending from Costa Rica southwards to Cape Horn, that the Carranza government is the actual existing dominating government in Mexico and should be treated as the sovereign power of that nation. Latin America is of one mind with regard to the American so-called "punitive expedition." It is believed in Argentine, Brazil and Chile, the great powers of South America, as well as among the lesser nations of this hemisphere, that the present attitude of the United States government is one of unreasonable prejudice and unfairness to her nearest neighbor.

Mexico stands good for all claims for damages caused by the revolution in lives, liberty and property, of Americans and other foreigners, illegally taken in the course of the prosecution of the war. This is the only way that reparation can be made. Mexico will stand good for those claims, even when most of the looting and life taken and general violation of international obligations in Mexico, were done by Villa and his associates when he was countenanced in this country, and not by General Carranza and the government agencies under him.

A nation is generally not justified legally, under the principles of international law, in intervening in the national affairs of another country except when the country referred to has so flagrantly and continually violated its international obligations that there is no other recourse. What I have said of the situation in Mexico will serve to show that no such condition has heretofore existed there or now exists. The war has been over for a number of months and the taking of life and destruction of property as incidents of war are practically at an end; and there

remains therefore, but one thing that is worthy of discussion in this connection, and that is whether or not the raids at the border would justify intervention by the United States into the affairs of Mexico. It must be admitted everywhere that these raids are organized for the purpose of destroying the peace and friendship between the governments of Mexico and the United States and I have already quoted the very words in which President Wilson has warned publicly the nation against that fact, in his statement a few weeks after the raid of Columbus.

If this is true, this situation ought to bring the two countries closer together in a firmer and warmer friendship rather than make them enemies; and it should emphasize and enforce the necessity of coöperation between the two governments in bringing about the coöperative patrolling or policing of their respective borders, by the soldiers of the two countries on their respective sides. In other words, the cause of the friction and the menace, to wit, the raids, should be prevented in the future by the coöperation suggested instead of by sending into Mexico an army, which moves secretly and without the knowledge of the Mexican authorities, for in the better case the Mexican government cannot see its way to coöperate.

There would be no justice in the United States intervening in the affairs of Mexico simply to prevent raids when the surest and most feasible way to prevent them is to devise means for their prevention by a frank understanding between the two governments. And this frank understanding can not exist so long as you keep in Mexico an army which is only calculated to disturb the country and to prevent the pacification of it.

But there are precedents in American diplomacy which make this point very strong. The New York *Evening Post* of June 24 prints an interview given by ex-Governor Baldwin regarding the American expedition in Mexico. Governor Baldwin said: "There is no doubt as to the rules of international law in regard to this. Nothing is better settled than that no nation has the right to send armed soldiers into the territory of another nation or to keep

them there without first getting its permission." Then Mr. Baldwin pointed out the difficulty the United States had with England in 1837, when some Americans fomented an insurrection in Canada from an island near the Canadian shore, with the aid of an American vessel, which brought over supplies and men from the port of Schlosser in New York. The Canadian officers sent over an expedition by night and after capturing the boat sent it over Niagara Falls, one American being killed in the attack. The President of the United States sent a message to Congress, saying that an atonement was "due for the public wrong done to the United States for this invasion of her territory" and added:

To recognize it as an admissible practice that each Government, in its turn, upon any sudden and unauthorized outbreak, on a frontier, the extent of which renders it impossible for either to have an efficient force on every mile of it, and which outbreak therefore neither may be able to suppress in a day, may take vengeance in its own hand without even a remonstrance and in the absence of any pressing or overruling necessity, may invade the territory of the other, would inevitably lead to results equally to be deplored by both.

Afterwards when Mr. Daniel Webster became Secretary of State, while this affair was unsettled, he wrote to the British minister at Washington that the only justification alleged was the right of self-defense but that that right did not justify the invasion of the United States soil unless the British Government could show that

the necessity for it was instant, overwhelming, leaving no choice of means and no moment for deliberation, and even if those were the conditions the act justified by the necessity of self-defence must be limited by that necessity and kept clearly within it.

Mr. Baldwin also states that correspondence followed with Lord Ashburton in which the British and American governments agreed on these principles: that

respect for the inviolable character of the territory of independent nations is the most essential foundation of civilization; that a strong overpowering necessity may arise when this great principle may and must be suspended, but that it must be so for the shortest possible period during the continuance of an admitted over-

ruling necessity and strictly confined within the narrowest limits imposed by that necessity.

After that Mr. Baldwin states that the main question now is whether or not the United States troops have overstayed their time in Mexico, even if they went in with permission of the Mexican government. Now let us consider whether the American expedition has been in accordance with this principle set forth by the government of the United States. After the raid of Columbus the American government sent an expedition into Mexico without even advising the Mexican government. When the Mexican government knew of the expedition, it requested the United States to come to an agreement by which both governments might cooperate in sending troops into each other's country for the pursuit of bandits. The United States admitted that in principle an agreement should be made but at the same time declined to consider that present expedition in this agreement and even in the case of further expeditions, declined to subscribe to any condition regarding the zone of its operations, the time of its stay, the arms to be taken into Mexico, and the number of men to form the expeditions. Under this condition it was impossible for the Mexican government to come to an agreement, so Mexico had recourse to the conference between Generals Scott and Obregon; but General Scott was unable to agree to a limitation of the stay of the troops or to accept any plans for cooperation, on the contrary, he wanted the American forces to operate independently. Mr. Carranza, therefore, could not approve of that agreement, and further negotiations were suspended.

Contrary to expectations in this country, the original expedition sent from Columbus, met with cooperation from the Mexican military authorities. General Pershing definitely reported that he had been furnished with scouts. This was stated by Secretary Baker in his interviews with the *New York Times* of March 16, 22 and 26, and the *New York Sun* of March 22. But soon afterward, the expedition was increased into an army 14,000 strong, with field artillery, infantry and other war machinery that could

only be intended to be used against the regular army of Mexico. The movements of the American army were kept secret not only from the Mexican authorities but even from the American public. Even newspaper correspondents to this day date their messages "somewhere at the front." At the same time arms and ammunitions purchased by the Mexican government were embargoed by the federal authorities under pretext of representations made by peace societies—an excuse which was not admissible in the face of the large shipments of munitions sent to Europe every day.

Nothing short of contemplating further trouble with Mexico could explain the embargo put on ammunition for Carranza at the same time he was urged to use his munitions in the extermination of bandits. Moreover, as the continuous interference of the United States government has fostered disturbances in Mexico for quite a time, this interference was becoming more material day by day. Mr. Carranza felt himself compelled to request your government to define its intentions towards Mexico. That is the note which has been so contemptuously spoken of by the antagonistic press and which seems to have angered the administration. In the drastic reply of the state department, your government has gone at length into the outrages and damages suffered by American citizens during the revolution and with the recent raids on the frontier, but gives no concrete or direct answer to the main inquiry of the Carranza note: namely, the further intentions of the United States. At the same time it may be observed that this reply contradicts many statements given to the press by members of the President's cabinet.

Now returning to the stay of the United States troops in Mexico, I will call your attention again to the fact that it is precisely those troops that are disturbing the peace in Mexico. The mere presence of a foreign army weakens the executive in any nation, and much more if that is combined with frequent foreign threats. That army is giving aid and comfort to the enemies of the government and is calculated to encourage sedition and outbreaks sooner or

later, so that Mr. Carranza is confronted with the dilemma of foreign complications or renewed civil strife. Is that the way to aid in the restoration of peace in Mexico and the rehabilitation of a de-facto government? Is that consistent with the friendship and good will so frequently proclaimed by President Wilson?

As a matter of fact only three raids have taken place including Columbus. The other two were Glenn Springs and San Benito. The raid of Columbus was a matter of common talk along the border nearly two weeks before it took place and even Mexican authorities warned Colonel Slocum who commanded the garrison of that town that Villa was marching against him. Colonel Slocum acknowledged the advice of the Mexican General Gavira but failed to prepare himself against the attack and was taken by surprise. Many Americans in Columbus were willing to send a protest against Colonel Slocum for that negligence.

The raid on Glenn Springs was made possible by the small garrison which was kept there, only nine men—an invitation to attack.

The raid on San Benito was an affair of outposts and neither civilians nor the military had casualties because due vigilance was exercised by Colonel Parker.

Nobody can explain how troops stationed within the state of Chihuahua can protect the American border at points more than a hundred and fifty miles distant. The 14,000 men of the Pershing column withdrawn from Central Chihuahua and properly disposed along the American border in the states of New Mexico and Texas would end every danger of border raids of any sort from Mexican territory into the United States. In other words, Mr. Wilson's punitive expedition has been at the expense of Texas and New Mexico rather than to their advantage and protection.

And effective protection can be made by withdrawing those troops from Mexico and extending them along the border; the withdrawal would at the same time relieve Mexico from every cause of uneasiness, restore the confidence of the Mexican people, first in their own govern-

ment and next in the honor and integrity of the United States—which at the present moment is sadly at a discount.

The answer to the problem of restoring peace in Mexico is comparatively simple. It may require a modicum of charity or patience or self abnegation on the part of the people of the United States and your President, but the cure is as certain as the disease is at present severe. This is the cure:

Withdraw the troops to a point within the boundaries of the United States. Create a staunch and strong patrol. Let the soldiers of the Constitutionalist government proceed with the work of bandit suppression and in turn you will create to the southward of your boundaries, first a new confidence among the Mexican people in the fairness and the earnestness of purpose of the government of the United States. Along with the creation of this sentiment will come a renewed confidence on the part of the people of Mexico that their own government has the respect and trust of its powerful neighbor and, therefore, is entitled to the respect of all law abiding citizens at home. Mines will resume their operations, the ranches will begin to ship their cattle northward and southward; railway communication will be restored and the financial situation will therefore in turn improve. With new confidence in the future, Mexico will ask nothing more than to be let alone and the Americans, nearest neighbors and internationally holding the most intimate relations, will find friendship resumed and Mexico looking with hope to a prosperous future in which the United States cannot help but participate.